

Warrior-Politicos Assault McNamara

By Marquis Childs

MORE THAN THE President himself his Secretary of Defense, **Robert S. McNamara**, is taking the punishment in the controversies that rage over the huge defense establishment and the military aspects of foreign policy. The shot and shell come from every side and if he looks drawn and tense it is hardly surprising.

Should he stay on in the job, and there is no reason to believe he will not stay, Mr. McNamara will be at the center of a dispute already shaping up over Viet-Nam. An exchange on Capitol Hill the other day was a portent.

Senator Strom Thurmond, the Republican convert out of South Carolina, was quizzing an Army general who seemed reluctant to confirm the Senator's views. Finally Senator Thurmond said:

"You aren't letting those civilians tell you what to do, are you? Are you mice or men over there?"

An influential and highly articulate wing of the Republican Party has begun the campaign for "victory" in Viet-Nam by extending the bombing raids. Bombing can win and therefore, so goes this war cry, it is wrong to commit large numbers of ground troops in a jungle war in Asia. The principal spokesman for this line is former Senator Barry Goldwater. But increasingly Republicans in Congress are championing the bombing way to easy victory.

FOR MANY REASONS Mr. McNamara will be their target of attack. Although it has not been generally understood, he has again and again resisted pressure from the Air Force and the Navy to push the war to limits making any political settlement all but impossible.

During the campaign last fall the Secretary did not hesitate to respond when Mr. Goldwater fired at him with what Mr. McNamara considered an irresponsible or inaccurate charge. He became, as Mr. Goldwater warmed up, "Yo-Yo McNamara" who was guilty of flying back and forth between Washington and Saigon and putting out conflicting reports on the progress of the war.

By a directive taking members of

Congress out of the Ready Reserve Mr. McNamara won the enmity of those with close links with the services. The directive put an end to Air Squadron 999 which had been called Senator Goldwater's own Air Force. Squadron 999, composed of Senators and Representatives and their staff assistants, was given to junketing around the world in Air Force planes. There was always a question as to whether holding a commission in the Active Reserve was not a violation of a provision of the Constitution that members of Congress may not be on active military service.

The Secretary, who takes members of Congress at their word when they argue for economy, has made enemies in two ways. His orders closing down a whole series of useless or inefficient bases and construction centers brought cries of anguish. Under the egregious new chairman, Mendel Rivers of South Carolina, the House Armed Services Committee has just voted to clip Mr. McNamara's wings. An amendment tacked onto the military construction bill would give either Senate or House the right to veto any McNamara order on bases.

THESE CONFLICTS are part of the hostility built up toward Mr. McNamara. But though they feed the controversy over bombing and the right of commanders to decide when and how and where they shall bomb, the essence is in the conviction of an easy war easily won from the air. This has been an important part of conservative Republican doctrine for a long time.

It was a major element in the political assault that developed over the Korean War beginning in 1951 and reaching a climax in General Eisenhower's campaign for the Presidency in 1952. That became "Truman's War" and the "privileged sanctuary" in China the reason American forces could not achieve victory in both North and South Korea.

Signs are multiplying that the same kind of controversy can grow out of the commitment of 100,000 men or more to South Viet-Nam and the casualties that will follow. President Johnson's popularity is high and he may not get the brickbats. But his Secretary of Defense, who has never dodged a controversy when he felt he was right, is vulnerable.

At stake, of course, is something far more than personal likes or dislikes. In Mr. McNamara's view it is a question of the certainty of civilian command and control in the nuclear age. And while the founding fathers who drafted the Constitution could not have foreseen this fantastic age they made civilian authority preeminent over the military.